NAXOS

AMERICAN CLASSICS

AARON COPLAND • ROBERT ALDRIDGE

Clarinet Concertos

David Singer, Clarinet

A Far Cry Orchestra • The Shanghai Quartet

Robert Livingston Aldridge (b. 1954): Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra • Samba

Aaron Copland (1900-1990): Clarinet Concerto

David Singer and I have been friends and colleagues for many years and had performed Copland's *Clarinet Concerto* together on numerous occasions on several continents. I was so pleased when he contacted me to produce his recording of this important work as I knew how beautifully he could play it and I was excited about making a recording of the piece that would showcase all the honesty, integrity and virtuosity that David brings to his music making. Robert Aldridge's masterful new concerto and playful *Samba* would complete the recording. I couldn't imagine a better pairing as Bob's concerto is, in my mind, the direct descendant of the Copland. It combines the energy and verve of our American spirit with an awareness of world music and a profound sensitivity that permeates the entire work. Add to all this, the virtuosic talents of A Far Cry, the Shanghai Quartet and Jesse Lewis, our extraordinary engineer, and I believe that we have combined all the essential elements for a truly engaging listening experience.

Donald Palma, Producer

This recording is the result of years of planning and dreaming. *Concerto for Clarinet and Orchestra* was inspired by and written for my good friend and colleague, David Singer, commissioned by Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and the Los Angeles Chamber Orchestra, and given its première in April and May 2005 by David and those two estimable groups (the LACO première was conducted by Jeffrey Kahane). Shortly after the co-premières, David shared with me his idea of wanting to record a CD pairing my new concerto with Aaron Copland's classic *Clarinet Concerto*. Needless to say, he didn't have to twist my arm very hard to convince me that this was a great idea!

In early 2003, David asked me to compose a clarinet concerto for him that would combine elements of classical music, folk, jazz and klezmer. I wanted to compose a piece for David that would demonstrate his extraordinary range, depth and virtuosity on the clarinet. Knowing that two first-rate chamber ensembles would be premiering the piece, I also wanted to engage the orchestra to a greater degree than perhaps is normally done in the concerto genre. We also agreed that the traditional three movement concerto form (fast-slow-fast) would be the best structure for this work.

I wanted the first movement to be both driving and with great energy, but lyrical as well. The movement, largely in 12/8, attempts to combine music that is light, fast, playful, intense, tuneful and expressive. The second movement begins with a slow and serene melody built on successive rising fifths and is somewhat akin to a jazz ballad, scored for solo clarinet and muted strings. The B section of the movement offers a vivid contrast and a surprise (first the woodwinds accompany the clarinet, followed by brass), before recapitulating to the opening tune. The third movement is a fast, polka-like finale, with a driving and maniacal edge. Though there is no cadenza in the concerto, the demands of the clarinet writing throughout require a fearless soloist to demonstrate a huge range of styles, sounds, colors and techniques.

David Singer quickly mastered this concerto for the performances with Orpheus and LACO, and now four years later, his interpretation continues to grow and astonish. As the *Star-Ledger* stated in reviewing the première of the work: *"Singer was brilliant... pity the poor clarinetist who has to follow in his footsteps."* Indeed!

Aaron Copland's *Clarinet Concerto* was completed in 1948, a commission from jazz legend Benny Goodman. The work was premiered by Goodman with Fritz Reiner leading the NBC Symphony Orchestra in a live broadcast in 1950. The concerto almost immediately entered the standard repertoire and is one of Copland's most often played and recorded works (which is saying something!). It is scored for solo clarinet, piano, harp and strings.

The concerto has a novel structure: two continuous movements, linked by an extended clarinet cadenza. The first movement is certainly one of Copland's most beautiful utterances in music: slow, serene, tender, mournful, and wonderfully poignant. As is usual with Copland, the simple exterior, with strings and harp accompanying the lyric clarinet, masks a deep and rich interior. The cadenza begins from nothing, growing inexorably to become an ecstatic and highly virtuosic show-piece: it is one of the most recognizable excerpts in the entire clarinet literature. The third movement begins with a perpetual motion type of figure in the piano (it's first entrance in the piece) and some of the most exposed and treacherous violin and clarinet writing in the literature. The jazzy and brilliant finale is both raucous and playful.

David Singer knows this concerto intimately, having performed it many times with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra. I can happily and honestly say that this is the best recording of the concerto that I have ever heard.

The chamber orchestra on recording, A Far Cry, are brilliant young players living in Boston. Their mentor is the producer of this recording, Donald Palma, who did a tremendous job making the recording as good as it is. His light but firm touch and his commanding expertise in performance and recording was an inspiration to all of us.

As an encore, we have included *Samba*, a five-minute work for clarinet and string quartet, which is an attempt to make this instrumentation sound like a latin big-band.

Special thanks to David Singer, The Shanghai Quartet, to my colleagues at the John J. Cali School of Music at Montclair State University, and to Jesse Lewis from SoundMirror Inc. Thanks also to C.F. Peters, Boosey and Hawkes, John Newton and Dirk Sobotka at SoundMirror, and Preston Dibble at Immaculate Conception Church in Montclair.

Robert Aldridge

This six-year project was a labor of love inspired by Bob's exciting, fun, and beautifully lyrical concerto, which he happened to write for me! I believe the Aldridge *Clarinet Concerto* will very quickly become a favorite for clarinetists as well as the music loving public everywhere.

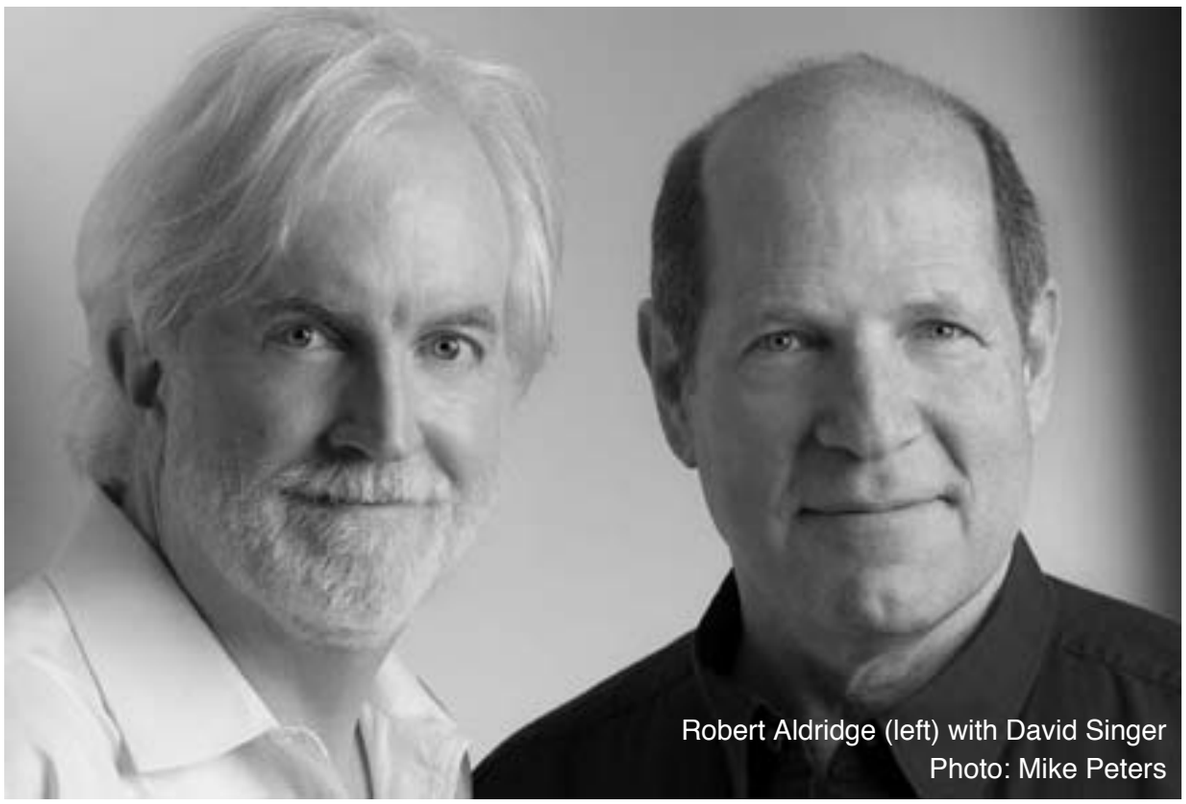
Samba, the last work on this recording, is also great fun to play and listen to. Special thanks to The Shanghai Quartet and A Far Cry, Don Palma, my colleague and friend with Orpheus for the past thirty years, to Jesse Lewis who drove all the way to Montclair, NJ on a rainy November afternoon looking for a church to record *Samba*, and to members of my family, especially Morrie Darnov and Shirley Greene, my uncle and aunt, whose very generous contributions made this project possible.

Six years ago when Bob asked me about the types of music I most enjoyed, Benny Goodman, Dave Tarras, Fritz Kreisler, Brahms, Dvořák and probably a few others popped into my head right away. The Aldridge *Concerto* has moments inspired by all of these great musicians and what is most impressive to me is that it is truly original. Infectious with driving rhythms and soaring melodies, this piece is engaging, accessible and fun!

It was a joy to record the Copland *Clarinet Concerto*. Listening to the great big band clarinetists of the late 1940s there was always beauty of sound, expressive lyrical phrasing and that famous phrase from Duke Ellington which underscored everything, "It don't mean a thing if it ain't got that swing." My interpretation of the Copland *Concerto* embraces those ideals.

David Singer

Robert Livingston Aldridge



Robert Aldridge (left) with David Singer
Photo: Mike Peters

Robert Livingston Aldridge (born in 1954 in Richmond,VA) has written over sixty works for orchestra, opera, music-theater, dance, string quartet, solo and chamber ensembles. He has received numerous fellowships and awards for his music from the Guggenheim Foundation (2002), the American Academy of Arts and Letters (2000), National Endowment for the Arts, the New York Foundation for the Arts, the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, the Massachusetts Artist's Foundation, the Lila Wallace Reader's Digest Fund, Meet the Composer, The American Symphony Orchestra League, the New Jersey Council on the Arts and the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. His opera, *Elmer Gantry*, based on the novel by Sinclair Lewis, with a libretto by Herschel Garfein, was given its fully-staged world première by Nashville Opera in November 2007, and received ecstatic reviews in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and *Opera News*. An *Orchestral Suite* from *Elmer Gantry* has been commissioned by the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra and will première in September, 2010. His music has recently been conducted by Keith Lockhart and performed by Gidon Kremer and Martha Argerich. He has been Composer-in-Residence at the Brevard Music Festival since 2006. His compositions are exclusively published by Edition Peters (CF Peters Corp.) Robert Livingston Aldridge received a Doctorate in Composition from the Yale School of Music, a Master's Degree in Composition from the New England Conservatory of Music, and a Bachelor's Degree in English Literature from the University of Wisconsin at Madison. Currently, he is Chair of the Music Department/John J. Cali School of Music at Montclair State University, where he is also a Professor of Music Composition and Theory.

David Singer

David Singer has become nationally known as one of the most highly respected clarinetists of today. At the Marlboro Festival he performed with Rudolf Serkin and together they recorded a Max Reger *Sonata*. With Yehudi Menuhin he performed the Bartók *Contrasts* in Carnegie Hall. He has been a featured performer with the Lincoln Center Chamber Music Society, including the world première of Pulitzer-Prize-winning composer Melinda Wagner's composition *Four Settings*. With the Aulos Wind Quintet and winner of the Naumberg Competition for Chamber Music in New York, he commissioned and recorded John Harbison's *Quintet For Winds*, which is now a standard repertoire piece internationally. David Singer also performed the world première of Charles Wuorinen's quartet *Fortune* in Bonn, Germany with the composer as pianist. Today he is a principal clarinetist of the Grammy-Award-winning Orpheus Chamber Orchestra and a featured member on many of the group's seventy recordings. He judges competitions, most recently with co-Directors of the Chamber Society Wu Han and David Finckel in deciding Chamber Music Society II personnel. He was also one of two judges who served with John Corigliano, for the Corigliano Clarinet Competition. David Singer is also Coordinator of Chamber Music and Woodwinds, Professor of Clarinet at the John J. Cali School of Music at Montclair State University.

A Far Cry

Photo: Yoon S. Byun

Acclaimed by the press, the self-conducted chamber orchestra A Far Cry explores the traditional boundaries of Western classical music, experimenting with the ways music is prepared, performed, and experienced. Most recently named Chamber Orchestra in Residence at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum starting in 2010, it was founded in 2007 as a tightly-knit collective of young professional Boston-area string players, and since then A Far Cry has developed an innovative structure of rotating leadership, both on stage and behind the scenes. This, in contrast to typical orchestras, empowers the musician and aims to distill a valuable diversity of opinion into a unified voice. In its short existence, A Far Cry has been embraced throughout the world with more than a hundred performances across America, three albums, and over 100,000 views on YouTube. A Far Cry's commitment to education and community is at the heart of its mission. Furthermore, by inaugurating a home-town concert series starting the fall of 2009, A Far Cry hopes to underscore the artist's relevance and ongoing importance to the community. In a partnership with the New England Conservatory (NEC) since 2008 and starting in 2009, as Chamber Orchestra in Residence at NEC, A Far Cry presents a series of concerts each year at NEC's Jordan Hall, regularly provides speakers on entrepreneurship for NEC Career Development Seminars, and collaborates closely with the NEC Preparatory School.

A FAR CRY

Violin
Andrew Eng
Annie Rabbat
Ashley Vandiver
Jae Cosmos Lee
Jesse Irons
Liza Zurlinden
Megumi Stohs
Sharon Cohen

Viola
Frank Shaw
Jason Fisher

Cello
Courtenay Vandiver
Loewi Lin

Bass
Karl Doty

Guest Criers (Extras)

Violin
Andrea Segar
David McCarroll
Ethan Wood
Jennifer Curtis
Ying Xue

Viola
Emily Deans
Karina Fox
Stephanie Fong

Cello
Alexei Gonzales
Aristides Rivas

Bass
David Goodchild
Tony Flynt

Flute
Bianca Garcia
Ben Smolen

Oboe
Jennifer Montbach
Mie Shiraishi

Clarinet
Amy Advocat

Bassoon
Ron Haroutunian
Luke Varland

Horn
Rachel Drehmann
Jacquelyn Adams

Trumpet
John Russell
Matt Ara

Trombone
Brian Mahany

Timpani
Craig McNutt

Piano
Dina Vainshtein

Harp
Marilinda Garcia

The Shanghai Quartet

Weigang Li, Yi-Wen Jiang, Violins · Honngang Li, Viola · Nicholas Tzavaras, Cello

Photo courtesy of Shanghai Quartet

Originally formed in Shanghai, the versatile Shanghai Quartet is known for its passionate musicality, virtuosic technique and multicultural innovations. To celebrate its 25th anniversary (2008-2009), the Quartet premières commissions from composers Chen Yi, Krzysztof Penderecki, and jazz pianist Dick Hyman. The Shanghai Quartet melds the delicacy of Eastern music with the power of Western repertoire, from traditional Chinese folk-music to the most challenging classical works. The Quartet regularly tours the great music centers of North and South America, Asia, and Europe, and has appeared frequently at New York's Carnegie Hall, with appearances in London, Vienna and Prague, and Australia's Sydney Opera House. The Shanghai Quartet has long championed new music, juxtaposing Eastern and Western sounds. Its extensive discography has grown to 24 recordings. A wide array of media projects include the soundtrack and a cameo appearance in Woody Allen's 2005 film *Melinda and Melinda* (Bartók *Quartet No. 4*). The Quartet has also appeared on PBS's Great Performances and can be heard regularly on NPR.

AMERICAN CLASSICS

NAXOS COPLAND • ALDRIDGE: Clarinet Concertos 8.559667

Playing Time: **49:44**

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COMPACT disc DIGITAL AUDIO

8.559667

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COPLAND • ALDRIDGE

Clarinet Concertos

Robert Livingston Aldridge (b. 1954): Clarinet Concerto (2004)* **27:17**

1. I. Fast and light 7:42
2. II. With serene and steady motion 10:57
3. III. Fast, bold and animated 8:38

Aaron Copland (1900-1990): Clarinet Concerto (1948)* **17:04**

4. I. Slowly and expressively – 6:35
5. I. Cadenza (freely) – 2:04
6. II. Rather fast 8:25

7. **Robert L. Aldridge: Samba (1993)**** **5:23

David Singer, Clarinet

A Far Cry Orchestra*

The Shanghai Quartet**

Producer: Donald Palma
Engineering, editing, mixing and mastering: Jesse Lewis (Soundmirror, Inc.)
Recorded at Mechanics Hall, Worcester, Massachusetts, USA, on 5th October, 2008 (tracks 1-3), and on 10th November, 2008 (tracks 4-6), and at Immaculate Conception Church, Montclair, New Jersey, on 17th December, 2009 (track 7)
Publishers: C.F. Peters Corp. (tracks 1-3, 7); Boosey & Hawkes Music Publishers, Inc. (tracks 4-6)
Booklet notes: Donald Palma, Robert Aldridge and David Singer • Cover art by Amarie Hill

AMERICAN CLASSICS

Aaron Copland's popular *Clarinet Concerto*, with its tender and poignant opening, highly virtuosic central cadenza and brilliantly jazzy final movement, is preceded by Robert L. Aldridge's *Clarinet Concerto,* which has been described as the direct descendant of the Copland. Classical, folk, jazz and klezmer influences are brought together in a work which is infectious in its driving rhythms and soaring melodies. Aldridge's *Samba* for clarinet and string quartet is an attempt to make this instrumentation sound like a Latin big-band. David Singer, the acclaimed longtime principal clarinetist of the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, is joined on this recording by the internationally renowned Shanghai Quartet and A Far Cry Orchestra, a Boston-based collective of young professional string players who perform without a conductor and with rotating leadership.

A FAR CRY

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